

## Coffman Forms Military Voting Working Group

(WASHINGTON) — Rep. Mike Coffman (R-CO) announced today he will form a working group with Reps. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) and Doug Lamborn (R-CO) to address military voter disenfranchisement resulting from instances of states failing to adequately implement the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act. The newly formed group will scrutinize and react to allegations of military voter disenfranchisement in the coming weeks as military ballots are counted and then consider appropriate legislative action to refine or strengthen the MOVE Act for future elections.

“For months, we have been emphasizing the importance of making sure that absentee ballots are sent to our brave men and women in uniform,” said Coffman. “We have an even greater responsibility to make sure that the ballots are counted once they have been returned. Undecided races around the country today, including the U.S. Senate race in Colorado, could hinge upon the ballots cast by our members of the military. It is also critical for our service members to have faith in the system and know we are paying close attention to, and vigorously defending military voting rights.”

“Our military men and women risk their lives and make innumerable personal sacrifices to protect the freedoms and rights of others – including the right the vote,” said Hunter, a Marine combat veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Those who serve in our nation’s military, like any other American, deserve to have their vote counted. The likelihood that some of our men and women in uniform might be denied this right, for what could be reasons related to political posturing, is outrageous. It’s critical that any challenges to creating a fully functional and efficient voting system for our servicemen and women are immediately resolved.”

Military voters have long faced obstacles to having their ballots counted by certain states. For example, in the 2008 presidential election, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission reported that several states had unusually high rejection rates for military absentee ballots. Some of

these states, including New Jersey and West Virginia, as well as the District of Columbia, rejected more than 40 percent of the military and overseas absentee ballots. Several other states had rejection rates for absentee military ballots that ranged between 20 and 40 percent.

Notwithstanding these unusual rejection rates, the Department of Justice has never brought a case to make sure that military absentee ballots were counted in an election. Coffman added, "Given what we have seen from the Justice Department this year, we can't expect that the Department will take a different approach this year."

"Our men and women in uniform are fighting two wars at this time and don't have time to take up a battle with the Justice Department over their voting rights," Lamborn said. "This group that I and my colleagues have formed will fight that fight for them. We are committed to doing all we can to ensure that our military members' votes are counted."

The MOVE Act requires states to mail unmarked absentee ballots to military and overseas voters at least 45 days before an election. The law also allows states to seek waivers from the Department of Defense if they can demonstrate a hardship. This year 10 states applied for waivers from the MOVE Act's 45-day deadline, and 6 were granted by the Department of Defense. The Department of Justice entered into settlement agreements with 4 states whose waiver applications were denied. The remaining 40 states did not apply for a waiver, and were obligated by federal law to mail ballots by September 18, 2010—45 days before the 2010 election. There is great concern that many military ballots will not be counted in this election.

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